CHAPTER VII

THE JEW *IN* EUROPEAN THOUGHT

IT is commonly assumed, perhaps too hastily, that the Hebrews of the Biblical period were uninterested in philosophy. A courageous attempt has recently been made to correct the impression. The Old Testament, it is now suggested, shows trace of a native Hebrew philosophy, Platonic in type but not in origin, which is especially noticeable in the Book of Ecclesiastes, In particular, the well-known "wisdom" passages of the 4th and 8th chapters of Proverbs are held to be the "remains of generations, and indeed centuries, of keen and devoted thinking on the problems raised by the phenomena of life".[1]

That this is in the main true is clear. The Old Testament is obviously the product of profound and exhaustive meditation on divine purpose and human destiny. But a distinction should be drawn between philosophy as a technical discipline and thought in the wider sense which includes feeling. The Book of Job gives classical expression to the rebellion of the human heart against the apparent tyranny of the ways of the universe; but its protest is not made in the technical forms of the syllogism, and its ending is as illogical as it is magnificent.

In the same way the Hebrew Bible as a whole offers a

view of life which is both, consistent and rational, but it

^acdonald, *The Hebrew Philosophical Genius* (Princeton, 1936), p. 49.